



The COVID dividend for cycling in cities

2020 was a year of enormous changes to work and transport in our cities and towns. Investments by all levels of government in connected bikeways and cycle lanes in response to the boom in cycling during lockdown have been very popular and have been an economic and community success story. The task is now to lock in those benefits as major businesses and governments offer active transport options to commuters who 'got back on the bike' during lockdown - the 'COVID dividend'.

A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER - HOW AUSTRALIANS RESPONDED TO LOCKDOWN AND SAFE, SEPARATED INFRASTRUCTURE. KEY POINTS:

- Cycling levels around Australia increased by up to 69% compared to pre-COVID (1) - after the initial boom they are still higher than before COVID.
- A new record for Australian bicycle sales will be set in 2020-21 of 1.75 million bikes (2). The previous record set was 1.42 million in 2007.
- Traffic on Sydney's pop-up cycleways reached 500,000 trips in the first 9 months and is expected to reach 800,000 in first year (3).
- Sydney's investment in the first 8.3km of pop-up cycleways has resulted in a more significant increase in traffic than forecast, with payback/ROI now expected to be less than 1.5 years (4).
- More direct jobs are generally created per \$1m investment in pop-up lanes, up to 2.5 time more jobs per dollar than other transport infrastructure.
- The Escarpment Boardwalk in Parramatta opened in April 2021 with 55,000 bike users in the first month - this was the target the business case assumed it would take ten years to reach.
- The Heidelberg Road pop-up lanes (Melbourne) have had 70,000 trips since opening and a 30% increase in commuting on week days (5).
- Macquarie Park - North Ryde is Australia's 4th largest CBD - with 110,000 people living, working & studying there. Reluctance to catch public transport has seen a 7% increase in driving to work post-COVID. This equals an additional 7,000 cars on the road. They invest in state-of-the-art facilities, programs and incentives but rely on an effective bike network to encourage cycle commuting.

WHAT IS THE OPPORTUNITY?

Australians rode bicycles in unprecedented numbers during COVID. The significant changes during the pandemic - less traffic, new infrastructure, the chance to increase skill and confidence in a safer environment, and the ability to spend time with family, overcame many of the traditional barriers to riding. The big increases in cycling were most pronounced among those new to cycling. The COVID crisis was a once in a generation event to which Australians responded in big numbers with the improved conditions. Investments in safe, separated bicycle infrastructure provide significant economic and social returns - especially for women. With traffic congestion for returning commuters now worse than before COVID as they avoid public transport and drive instead, investing to give Australians the opportunity to ride a bike for short trips is paying big dividends for local, state and federal governments.

We Ride Australia - the national independent voice for cycling - www.weride.org.au

FEDERALLANDTRANSPORTACT: The National Land Transport Act (2014) provides for funding of pedestrian and bicycle paths as part of federal road projects.

SOURCES:

1. Cycling trends across Australia pre- during and post COVID, <https://metrocount.com/cycling-trends-across-australia-pre-during-post-covid/>
2. 'A new record in bike numbers', see <https://www.bikeoz.org/news/a-new-record-in-bike-numbers1>
3. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/unparalleled-sydney-s-most-popular-pop-up-bike-path-overtakes-city-s-busiest-20210505-p57p6e.html>
4. Radio interview: 3cr.org.au/yarrabug/episode-202106071000/public-access-old-heidelberg-road-talking-sara-stace-about-streets
5. <https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/traffic-and-road-use/cycling/pop-up-bike-lanes>
6. <https://news.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/pop-ups-to-go-permanent-as-rider-numbers-rocket>

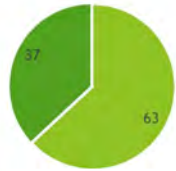


Cycling during COVID-19: Changes in Cycling Behaviour

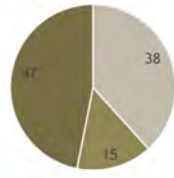
In a study conducted in August and September 2020 Australians were surveyed by a team of researchers about their cycling activities during COVID, changes in their travel patterns and reasons for those changes. The study provides an insight into the boom in Australians riding bicycles during the pandemic and the relatively bigger gains for those new to cycling and for women who took up cycling more than men in lockdown.

During national lockdown vs post-national lockdown cycling

Cycling activity increase or decrease under restrictions (%)



Cycling activity after restrictions relaxed (%)



Since Covid 19 restrictions have been relaxed in May 2020, compared to my cycling activity at the height of the restrictions.

N = 444 Men: 77%, Women: 21%

Important factors for new cyclists

Importance of pedestrian overcrowding by history of cycling (%)



Importance of secure bicycle parking by history of cycling (%)



Legend: Not very/not at all important, Somewhat important, Very/extremely important

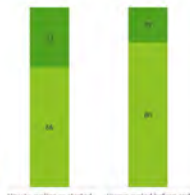
Legend: Not very/not at all important, Somewhat important, Very/extremely important

Infrastructure is 'very/extremely important' for new riders.

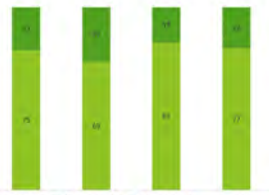
- Crowding on paths with pedestrians is more important for new riders (45%) than those who have cycled (39%)
- Secure bike parking is also more important for new riders (41%) than those who have cycled (30%).

Was gender a factor?

Cycling history by gender (%)



Cycling activity after national lockdown by gender (%)

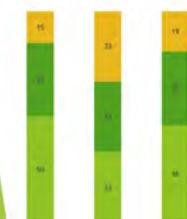


Since Covid 19 restrictions have been relaxed in May 2020, compared to my cycling activity at the height of the restrictions.

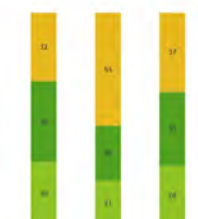
- Relatively more women were new to cycling (33%) than had 'always cycled before' (19%), and
- After restrictions were relaxed, more said their cycling had increased or was the same (23% + 19% = 42%) than decreased (29%).

Gender differences in reasons for increased cycling

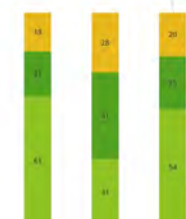
Increased confidence by gender (%)



Fewer cars on road by gender (%)



Gym was closed by gender (%)



If your cycling increased at the height of the Covid 19 restrictions please indicate the importance of each of these reasons (select as many as appropriate).

- For women, increased confidence was 'extremely important' (33%) for more women than men (15%)
- Fewer cars on the road was 'extremely important' to more than half of all women (53%) but less so for men (33%).

We Ride Australia - the national independent voice for cycling - www.weride.org.au

'Cycling during COVID-19 Survey: Changes in Cycling Behaviour'

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DOWNLOAD PAPER AT:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590198221000841>

The **Parliamentary Friends of Cycling** was established to provide a non-partisan forum for parliamentarians to meet and interact with cycling and active transport groups on matters relating to current practice and benefits provided by the bicycle and active transport, it's contribution to better health and mental health, improved community liveability and environment, increased transport options (incl. e-bikes, micromobility, and new technologies) and economic development, opportunities in regional Australia through destination marketing build around bicycle facilities and cycle tourism.

We Ride Australia supports the Co-Chairs for Parliamentary Friends of Cycling events. www.weride.org.au E-mail: yes@weride.org.au

